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1908

# POEMS

W. E. B. DENDERSON

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## POEMS



# POEMS

BY

W. E. B. HENDERSON

LONDON

KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH, TRÜBNER & CO., LTD.

1908

TURNBULL AND SPEARS, PRINTERS, EDINBURGH



PR

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TO E. A. H.

*As one by one, in leisure hours,  
I plucked my weeds, you called them flowers :  
And each its drooping head did raise,  
Drinking the water of your praise.  
But now at last my faltering hand  
Has bound them with Hope's golden strand.  
The knot is fast : so, dearest, take  
And wear the posy for my sake.*



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## RENUNCIATION

### I

#### DAWN

DAWN, dawn at last ! from God's red lids of cloud  
Heavy with weeping for the agony  
Of me, His creature, His Great Eye looks forth  
Wan through a mist of tears upon the world.

Dawn ! cold and grey and desolate of hope,  
Dawn palely issuing from the womb of Night  
Cold as a babe still-born—and yet I live,  
Though 'tis Death's hour, and in full tide flows on  
His River : see how silently it glides  
Past all those weeping figures on the marge.  
Ah God, that I might sink into the flood  
With one long sigh of uttermost content  
As the dark waters kissed above my head—  
For now I know that she and I must part.

The knowledge came so swift, so quietly,  
Not with wild surge and inrush on the soul  
Of seething thought, mad impulse slain at birth

Toward violence or self-murder—nay, not that—  
Rather I *knew*, and in my depths a string  
Snapped, then a moment quivered and was still.  
*That* music will be mute for ever more.  
It was the string on which she used to play,  
Her touch alone drew out such harmonies  
As my poor soul might yield. But He, the stern  
Master Musician deemed her music ill—  
So fine His ear—and let His wrath flash out  
And sudden plucked the string with petulant hand  
And brake it. . . . Wherefore God, that string alone?  
Ah wherefore did'st Thou leave the instrument  
To linger useless on, barren of sound?  
No loving Father Thou, but, as of old,  
Jehovah gorged with blood of sacrifice,  
Devising this supremest cruelty  
To leave me life, yet rob me of my love.  
“Thou shalt not—” aye forbidding all of sweet  
To us on earth—Ah me, we were so near  
Our Eden, she and I. “A jealous God”——  
Sending Thine Angel with the Flaming Sword  
Lest we should enter in and be as gods  
In our own heaven, more glorious far than Thine.  
And I, poor fool, thought thou did'st weep for me  
But now. . . . Peace, peace, break off! my words  
are wild,  
For Marah's flood hath swept away the bounds  
Thy hand hath set 'twixt Truth and Blasphemy.

Back, back to that child's groping after light,  
That stumbling down Life's path, before she came  
And took my hand and led me straitly on,  
And half her burden on my back she cast  
To lighten mine; and even as we fared  
Onward, with that dark shadow 'twixt us twain—  
Shadow of him by church and forms of law  
Licenced her body's lord—a sudden light  
Flashed in our path, and yawning at our feet  
A gulf . . . she shuddering saw and understood,  
And each in other's eyes the unspoken thought  
Read : in one moment all the years rushed by—  
I heard them. . . . When eternities had passed  
She, smiling wanly, spake. "Thus far, my friend,  
No further. You and I have deemed the path  
Sweet, but our ways branch off to left and right  
Henceforth,"—the sweet lips quivered, and the smile  
Froze, and her eyes, twin worlds of misery  
Dulled by the mist and haze of unshed tears  
Stabbed me, and that death-pallor of her face . . .  
And then half mad with passion and with ruth  
I grasped her wrist's white circle, and she shrank  
And thinned her lips in pain, and glancing down  
I saw that devil's thumb mark . . . quickly she,  
"When he . . . you know . . . he cannot judge  
his strength  
At all times." Then—Ah God, the madness rose  
And in my passion's surging torrent and rush

Will, judgment, honour, swift as autumn leaves  
Sucked downward, vanished in the eddy and swirl.  
Fiercely I clasped her, and on eyes, lips, hair  
Rained wild, delirious kisses . . . then released  
She for a space, as blinded by the storm,  
Stood with shut eyes, lips parting : then she sank  
Hiding her face and wept—no easy tears  
But dreadful, strangling sobs that from her depths  
Struggled with piteous travail. For a space  
I stood in torment while they racked her frame.  
At last she fought them down, and rising, turned  
Wild hopeless eyes, her bosom like a sea  
Yet heaving after storm. “This is the end——”  
Hope died within me as I heard her voice  
So strange, remote, aloof——“Tis o’er, my friend,  
This masquerade of Love in Friendship’s garb.  
Not while he lives . . . Farewell.”

E’en as she spake  
She faltered, and, her face suffused with shame,  
Flung tense, rebellious arms about my neck,  
And in the misty splendour of her eyes  
I read “Ah, leave me not.”

She heard a sound  
Or seemed to hear, and thrust me from her side—  
“Go now—to-morrow !” and her glorious eyes  
Were bright with guilty promise . . .

At the gate  
I stood aside : he passed, her chosen lord,



Her husband—Blood of Christ ! He saw me not,  
But with glazed eye and slurring satyr-tread  
Passed on. Her wrist——! “He cannot judge his  
strength

At all times.” . . . When the blood-mist from mine  
eyes

Had rolled, and those strange lights and thunderings,  
I woke, and found him gone : and stupidly  
Marvelled I had not slain him ere he bore  
The reek of wine and infidelity

To her pure presence. . . . Ah, the mist once more  
Blood-red, with wild pulsations in the brain.

Then with tense fingers twitching for his throat  
Homeward I strode ; one thought so strangely clear  
Stood out : that I should slay him on the morn.

Long time I lay and tossed upon my couch,  
And e’er with calm insistence urged a Voice  
“Kill,” and the hours, teeming with fancies wild,  
Dragged toward the dawn, till at the last I slept  
And then—this trance, this vision of the night !

I dreamed that with slow step and measured tread  
I paced the shadowy pathways of Romance :  
On either side a shrouded Majesty  
Possessed my hand, and ever led me on  
Unwavering, and I knew,—as we in dreams  
Know,—they were Love and Honour : silently  
We fared through misty regions of the dead

Onward and ever on, and in our wake  
Swelled a dull, wailing cry of tortured souls.  
I felt Love's fingers tighten over mine :  
He turned, and in deep tones, made musical  
By some immortal sorrow, " These are they  
That in their mortal life have loved as thou,  
Yet sinned as thou hast not, save in thy thought.  
Thou shalt not see these pale, unhappy wraiths  
That, walking the lowlier pathways of the world,  
Drugged deep their aching hearts with guilty love,  
And, waking, sought again the numbing draught  
To drown in wild delirium of the sense  
The low, insistent whisperings of the soul——  
Not these——but they that vaunted pride of place,  
That grasped in life the sceptre, bare the crown,  
They that for guilty passion ventured all——  
Passion that sways an empire, wrecks a throne,  
High in its own fierce heaven, mocking at hell."  
He ceased, and led me onward : in our wake  
The wailing died to silence, all the air  
The memory of a cry. Great wastes of land  
Virgin of life we passed, and, faring on,  
Entered a forest : gloom and solemn hush  
Reigned, and o'erhead thick, interlacing boughs  
Fraught with strange menace roofed us from the sky,  
Nor song of birds,——nor leaf on any tree  
Danced, but dead calm weighed down the prisoned  
air.

Then on the silence brake "Broceliande!"  
In Love's hushed whisper, "Here he sleeps away  
That baleful-glorious draught of scarlet fire,  
The nectar of the lips of Nimüe.  
Hearest thou not the intake and the thrust  
Of that sweet faëry breath she breathed in him?  
List—yet again!" He ceased, and from afar  
The measured sigh and whisper of soft breath,  
Taken in sleep, fell gently on mine ear.  
"Here by a magic mightier than his own——  
Hot, frenzied kisses from a wanton mouth——  
Conquered he lies—not slain, but wrapped in trance  
Till all false love be blotted from the world.  
Then shall he rise and wield his spells again."  
Love paused, and Honour, turning on his face  
Sad, wrathful eyes, swift spake "All, all was lost  
Through thee: the piled up wisdom of long years,  
The garnered magic, hoarded with slow art  
Through all his hundred winters in a trice  
Lay in the hollow of a wanton's hand:  
Thou tak'st rich fuel to feed thine altar flame!"  
To whom the first "Not love, but wild desire  
Was theirs. Ah, know'st thou not that without  
thee  
I am not Love, but baseness? Let us hence,  
We are so near those two that wrongly loved  
In that far western land so long ago.  
Onward."

Love laid a hand upon my brow,  
And dark and darker loomed Broceliande,  
Vanished, and on a sudden lo ! I stood  
High on a rugged headland, and was 'ware  
Of the low moaning of a faëry sea  
That with soft crooning kisses lipped its base.  
And high above us, fronting on the main,  
A castle : lofty battlements and towers  
Sombre, aloof, austere against the sky  
Stood out with darkling menace : o'er the sea  
A golden pathway from the dying sun  
Stretched to the land, and quivered like some live thing  
With flickering undulations. I was 'ware  
Of a tall ship, her sails all sunset-flushed,  
That clave the dancing gold, and at the prow  
A warrior robed in fire, whose burning eyes  
Strained toward the castle.

Love upon my arm  
Laid a light hand, and whispered " Let thine eyes  
Follow his gaze." I looked and I beheld  
Framed in a casement sunset-flushed, a face  
Of wild, proud beauty crowned by hair of night,  
And two dark wondrous eyes that swept the main.  
Then swift a blinding glory o'er her face  
Flashed, and the brooding eyes, awak'd from sleep  
By some fierce, sudden joy, leapt into flame,  
And from such lips as lure the souls of men  
Brake a low cry of " Tristram ! "

At the sound

Love raised a hand, and all was lost in mist,  
Erased by swift dream-changes . . . and I stood  
Ever with Love and Honour at my side  
In a vast chamber, richly stored with gear  
And on the walls fair hangings. Nigh the door  
A couch, whereon she lay, whose loveliness  
Shone o'er the sea : without a distant step  
Louder and louder through long galleries  
Grew on the sense. She heard, and from the couch  
With one lithe movement leapt, and, deathly pale,  
Swaying and shaking with the passion-storm  
That swept her nigh to a swoon, uncertainly  
Moved toward the door : 'twas on the instant flung  
Wide, and her warrior from the gilded main  
Flashed on her sudden, dominant, supreme.  
I hear her gasp and intake of swift breath,  
Then with a cry they twain, like meeting waves,  
Fused into one, and after that wild cry  
Silence . . . it was so terrible to hear  
That passion-silence . . . but it came at last——  
Their lips reluctant parting——and they stood  
With drinking eyes that never took their fill.  
Then sudden she, quite simply, like a child  
O'erwearied, laid her head upon his breast.  
And stooping he, as one that plucks a flower,  
Swung her aloft and held her, pasturing  
With hovering kisses on her eyes, lips, brow,

And in his arms, the limit of her world,  
So meek she lay—that dark imperious Queen——  
Making surrender, sweeter for the pride  
That barred it from all others. In his arms  
He bare her to the couch, whereon they sate  
And then at last he found that he could speak.  
“Isolde, my star, my glory, my white flower,  
Breathing thy heady fragrance till the brain  
Reels, and the eyes are dim——” he could no  
more

But in her lips’ red wonder merged his voice.  
Softly she sighed, then, turning on his rapt face  
The tender, upward triumph of her smile,  
Brake forth in music, “Tristram of Lyonesse!  
My Tristram! I am thine so utterly!  
Thy flower, thou say’st? If such indeed am I,  
O thou, my sun, shine out in all thy strength,  
Draw forth my perfume with one flaming kiss  
Till all the fragrance hoarded from the world  
Rise up, like incense, to my own soul’s god!”  
She paused, the vibrant passion of her voice  
Trembling to silence; then with languorous grace  
Tossed o’er his neck a loop of fragrant hair  
Drawing him down, and all mock-wrathfully  
Flashed out “Unknightly! Fifty times my heart  
Hath beat since last it rioted on thine.  
Ere this thou might’st have kissed me fifty times.  
I do not lightly bear such negligence.

O dastard knight, an thou dost fly the lists  
This rope shall hale thee."

Once again her mood  
Changed, and low murmuring, that I scarce could  
hear,

She panted "Tristram, fold me in thine arms  
Close—close——Ah, how I yearn for the sweet pain  
Numbed, breathless, swooning —— Oh, to meet  
death thus

Crushed in thine arms—my heart at thy lips' touch  
Maddened——then stilled by that last passion-clasp."

He for a space a quivering silence held,  
Then all his soul burst forth in frenzied speech  
"Isolde! Isolde! Queen of the flaming West,  
Sea of the surging river of my blood,  
Mine! Mine, by the sting and fire of that deep  
draught

That hurled us each on other. O my rose,  
Flaunting the riotous splendour of thy bloom,  
The stealing exhalations of thy soul  
Circle me round with sweetness, and I yield,  
Swept in by the eddying whirlwind of desire.  
O radiant, thronèd Queen of Tournament,  
For thee, for thee I thundered through the lists,  
Mad with the lust for glory in thine eyes,  
Drunk with the crash and hum of splintering swords.  
And lances flashing fire on riven helmets  
Till I could shout for joy of the battle-blare,

All, all to barter blood and wounds and death  
To win thine eyes' quick flash, that deeper smile  
Pregnant with promise of the after sweet.  
Isolde, that night we first began to live,  
That night upon the ship ! Thou dost recall ?  
The great deep shimmering 'neath a summer moon,  
And that faint trembling of the silvered sails  
Fanned by the soft breath of the sleeping wind."  
Then shuddering she, " Recall ! when my whole  
soul

Rebelled—! A bride for Mark, the Cornish King !  
For him, for him whose name to heaven's four winds  
Stank in men's nostrils ! Thou of all the world  
Mine escort to that mockery ! "

Swift he spake,

" No more of Mark in this first hour of joy,  
Isolde, Isolde, that night upon the sea  
We drained the maddening philtre of desire ;  
How swift the magic wrought upon our blood—  
Thy sudden step—the pause—thy hungry eyes  
Blazing with new-born splendour of desire,  
And then—oblivion. . . . Coldly brake the dawn,  
Dim through the mist Tintagel reared her towers.  
And thou Mark's bride—O wonder of the West !  
What reck we twain of Mark, thy dastard lord ?  
O pale enchantress with thy dreaming lakes  
Of sombre passion, thus—in one long kiss  
I drown thought, memory, speech ! "



A silence fell,  
Then Honour clave the stillness in low tones  
Poignant with some celestial bitterness,  
“ Was it for this he wore his knighthood’s flower,  
For this he graced the tourney, bare the prize,  
Crashing resistless through the glittering field ?—  
Strength, honour, manhood—all to sate the lust  
Of an imperial wanton—— ? ”

With sad eyes  
Love answered, “ Friend, the shame not thine alone,  
For by this draught unhallowed and profane  
I too was wronged, degraded, desecrate  
Of sweet unforc’d surrender, soul to soul.  
And yet we twain by one that knew us not  
Fouly avenged—— Behold ! ”

Behind the couch  
A sliding portal oped its stealthy lips,  
And two small eyes, sunk in a swarthy face,  
Narrowed their baleful glitter on the couch.  
And with slow, soundless patience, inch by inch,  
The fissure yawned to measure of a man,  
And in his hand the glint of naked steel,  
Tense, watchful, silent toward the couch he crept,  
Then stooped and grasping Tristram by the hair  
Drave the swift-diving steel from neck to throat . . .  
And then with dreadful smile and glittering eyes  
On the dead shoulder propped a mocking face,  
Seized the dead wrists, guiding the puppet hands

To blind caressing of her rigid face,  
And all in silence——silence . . . then—Ah God,  
The awful, mirthless laugh that from her lips  
Brake at the groping hands! . . .

Then darkness fell.

At last from the blind confusion of my dream,  
Formless, chaotic——shapes that went and came,  
Unhappy shadows flitting to and fro——  
A veil was lifted, and forth shone the world—  
A new dream-country warm with breath of May.  
And with the twain, my shrouded sentinels,  
I stood. On either hand a grove of pines,  
Still, silent——watchful of the rising sun.  
And with the stifled voice of one that sleeps  
A brook drowsed murmuring onward : over all  
The hush'd expectancy of summer dawn.  
A woman's voice ! Tender and rich and full ;  
A low sweet snatch of haunting melody  
Sank in a flitting sigh.

Skirting the bend  
Of those massed pines——dark warriors of the wood,  
Tense, upright, motionless in battle-square——  
There came two riding : swift the infant sun  
Danced on the gleaming bridles. Radiant she  
With soft, ethereal loveliness ; her hair  
Streamed rippling down, her palfrey's milky flank  
Hid by a fragrant cloud of glorying gold.

But through the troubled beauty of her eyes  
A soul, self-warring, looked upon the world.  
And he, that other, dark and proud of mien  
Save for the eyes' quick sweetening as they turned  
On her that rode beside him.

At her words  
"Here let us rest, Sir Lancelot—" swiftly they  
Dismounting captive made the willing steeds,  
And on the dead breast of a stricken pine  
Sate, and a silence fell betwixt the twain.  
She on her hand's clenched pallor cushioning  
As pale a cheek, with drear, unseeing eyes  
Groped through the thickening twilight of her  
thoughts.

Till one, it seemed, e'en darklier than the rest  
Stood forth, and drave her shuddering back to earth.  
Then wearily she raised her head and spake.  
"Another day! Once more the eternal sun  
Toils toward his sheer omnipotence in heaven.  
Peace o'er the world! unutterable peace——  
Save in my bosom——"

He with troubled eyes  
Questioned her brooding face. "Weary, my  
Queen?"

"Weary!" She turned. "I think there was a time—  
So long ago—I since have fared so far  
Its wake hath dimmed and faded utterly  
From my life's ocean——when I looked on Peace,

Knew her my sister, housed her in my breast,  
And now——the silent conflict day by day,  
And in the long night-watches ere the dawn  
The builded self-deceptions, questionings  
Dim, fruitless, unavailing——”

Suddenly

She paused, as one mistrustful of her power  
To check her heart's wild uprush into speech  
Through the drawn sluice, yet something in her tone  
He caught, and spake, trembling exceedingly,  
“I too have known long nights of sleep forlorn,  
Ah, must I fight the current evermore,  
Never to turn, committing weary limbs  
To the swift rush of waters toward the sea——?”  
“Thou too ——!” —— so faint her voice ——  
“then . . .”

Inch by inch

The eyes of each lured other : brokenly  
He whispered, “ Drifting——drifting toward the sea,  
My sea——!”

Dead silence, as their ranging souls  
Brake prison bars, indissolubly merged,  
Shaming the tardier meeting of their lips  
As tremblingly she swayed into his kiss. . . .

Her eyes were misty stars as waveringly  
Each from the other drew. A little space  
They nursed the new-found glory : then at last

He roused himself and spake : “ My Guinevere !  
At last ! so near to this a thousand times  
We twain have hovered——touch of hand or glance  
Given and ta'en, and I could see thy soul  
Lean from her casement, fluttering as for flight,  
Yet fear to spread her wings.”

’Twixt reverent hands

He framed her face, transfigured by his kiss  
To glory not of earth, then backward drew  
In awe, as one that gazes on a saint,  
“ O starry splendour searing through my soul——  
Guinevere ! Guinevere, unto thee the world  
Hath yielded up her store of loveliness !  
The rose hath spilled her heart upon thy cheek,  
Thou in the westering sun hast bathed thy hair  
And drawn it glistening forth for my delight.  
The winds have kissed away the golden tears,  
The flowers have breathed in it that flow and ebb  
Of faint, beleaguering fragrance. O my Queen,  
Thy spirit hovers brooding o’er the world.  
The trees, wind-swept to shuddering litanies,  
Moan forth thy name, murmuring “ Guinevere ! ”  
To the rapt stars. O throb and pulse of me,  
O storm and spate upsurging o’er my soul  
Drown me for ever ! ”

Passion-stunned she gazed

A while, then that swift, realising flash  
Leapt, blurring, o’er the glory. “ Lancelot,

So long ago, I knew this hour was nigh,  
And now 'tis here, and yet—Ah, Mother of  
Heaven!

How oft my lips have prayed it might not come,  
And all the while I knew yet would not know  
My heart's wild yearning for it: hope and dread  
Waging their ceaseless war on my soul's field.  
And now my own true knight—"divinely shone  
Her eyes' sad tenderness—"we twain have met  
And greeted—and we *know*—"then falteringly,  
"No more we twain—alone—while yet he lives,  
Arthur—my lord—"

—She paused, and I was 'ware  
Of Love's ruth-laden eyes bended on me,  
"Her words to thee!" he whispered—

At the name

Of Arthur swift the glory died away  
From Lancelot's eyes: dumbly he turned aside  
Bowing his head, and drear the silence closed  
Around. With lightning swiftness o'er my brain  
Remembrance flashed of their sad history  
Dimming mine eyes with tears, yet through the mist  
Swift to her face I marked the conscious tide  
Surge, then that sculptured pallor with the ebb—  
I heard her strangled "Arthur!", turning saw  
A rider clad in steel: his vizor up  
Bared to the breeze a face of kingly mould  
Lit by such eyes as thrall the wills of men,

Leading through fear to reverence and love.  
Slipping to earth, he came whereas they sate,  
But ere the speech could leap from eyes to lips  
The Queen upsprang, and, tripping in tremulous  
    haste,  
Had fall'n, but Lancelot, swifter than the King,  
Diving had caught her wrist with steady hands.  
Then to the Queen slow turning spake her lord.  
“No hurt—? we owe much thanks to Lancelot  
That his the pain, not thine.”

    With wondering eyes  
He answered, “Pain, my liege? what hurt to me  
To save the Queen from hurt?” To whom the King  
With rippled brow, “No pain! well pleased am I  
One night hath poured such balm upon thy wound.  
Thou hast forgot we twain on yester eve  
Spake of this joust, new spent from which I come,  
And thou didst crave my leave to stand aside  
For that some wound, ta'en in an idle tilt,  
Had bound thine arm fast prisoner to thy flank—  
All this in the gathering gloom of yester eve.”  
He paused—unanswered: then he spake once more,  
The voice was ill to hear—“May all thy wounds  
Be healed with equal haste.” Then Lancelot  
Compelled some vague reply from smiling lips,  
But flushed his cheek with anger, and his eyes,  
Hard, sunless, watchful, sought the King's, and fell.  
They stood—those three—in silence.

At the last  
Spake Arthur. "Let us hence,"—so chill his voice  
And toneless—silently they gat to horse  
And, she that was to part them evermore  
Riding between, in silence passed away  
Each to eternal infelicity.

"Thou hast beheld the sowing of the seed  
Now shalt thou view the harvest"—

Solemnly  
Love's voice tolled in upon my reverie.  
"Enough!" I cried, remembering all their woe,  
"Rack me no more!"

But Love with tender eyes,  
"My Master bare the Passion and the Cross,  
And wilt thou quail even to look on death  
For thy soul's health—the soul He died to save?  
Ask me no more, for thou must see the end."  
He raised a hand and once again the mist  
Blotted the world. . . .

A garden hedged around  
With ancient walls mellowed by eating time,  
Low crumbling roofs crowned with majestic towers,  
Grey guardians of the immemorial peace  
That in the cool, unfluctuating air  
Lay brooding—then I saw!

There in the midst  
He stood with pleading eyes and suppliant hands



Before that shrouded Sister once the Queen.  
Her staring eyes looked wildly from a face  
White as the snowy band about her brow.  
And at their feet in sombre majesty  
——Stronger in death to part them than in life——  
There lay the phantom of the wounded King.  
And then, as Lancelot strove to clasp her hand,  
The hurrying, strangled whisper as her eyes  
Glared down, “Back, back! Thy foot——! Ah,  
God in heaven!  
Across the body! . . . See’st thou not——the face,  
Dead, watchful eyes—the death-gash on the brow——!  
Go, go!”

    In agony I turned aside  
Clinging to Love, “No more, Ah Christ, no more!  
Mercy!” His eyes were soft with holy light  
And then. . . .

    A barren headland by the sea——  
Wild waste of waters and a dying sun  
And at my side a Figure. “Love!” I cried,  
Some keener suffering for a tortured soul——?  
Deep stillness! then with tenderness divine  
The answer, “It is finished. Go thy way.”  
I heard the voice, I saw the wounded palm  
Uplifted, and I *knew* . . .

    Then over all  
Confusion, void, a shuddering back to life,  
A drear and alien dawn. . . .

## II

## EVENING

Tis o'er—that latest meeting—she and I—  
So strange : no more to greet her as of old—  
The speaking handclasp, eloquent of all  
The lips would leave unuttered—tender eyes  
Of revelation : ne'er again to pluck  
In easeful commune half the tangled skeins  
From out Life's web : no more to sit, we two,  
In sweet, according silence, redolent  
Of her soul's perfume through the word withheld.  
Ah, that sweet merchandise of glance for glance,  
Barter of words, fair interchange of thought,  
And then—the o'erwhelming thunder-crash of sense,  
The lightning passion searing to the root.  
Our mellowing comradeship to bear no more  
The perfect fruit. And now the storm hath passed  
That lashed us bare alike of hope and guilt.

So strange, so calm, that stupor of farewell——  
She rose, an alien sweetness in her eyes,  
Sad presage—then her voice came low and clear,  
“Speak not, my friend. I see it in your face.  
Quickly were best——”

. . . a strand of her dark hair  
Strayed from the mass : an inch—? nay, less : a touch

Would smoothe it back . . . that pendant at her  
breast,

A pearl was lost—the tiny fangs of gold

Curved o'er a void . . .

——“we will not meet again

While he . . . farewell—go quickly.”

Tenderly

Her lips' cold benediction on my brow

Fell—and I woke beneath the incurious stars.

Two shattered lives groping their way toward death,

Two souls laid quivering on Thine altar flame,

O God of Judgment, art thou satisfied?

## SARAH

SUNSET ! and all the West incarnadined——  
Behold ! the glow hath glorified, illumed  
The features of my babe, the gift of God !

Sunset ! *My* sun hath risen in mine age :  
I, Sarah, barren fourscore years and ten  
Have born a child to Abraham my lord.

Sunset and afterglow ! It is the hour  
When happy mothers croon their babes to rest ;  
—Ah God ! my bitter hour in days of old,  
When night was closing in upon the world,  
And slowly to my wild and tearless eyes  
The eternal hills were mingled with the clouds,  
And all became one blackness of despair  
To me, the childless woman : all the day  
A ceaseless hunger gnawed about my heart,  
But, when the day was dying, surged in me  
So vast a tide of fury at my wrongs  
That I would drive my nails into the palm  
And plunge my prisoning teeth upon the lip  
That trembled to blaspheme against the Lord

Who laid His grievous curse upon my womb.  
And she—the Egyptian ! Yet do I behold  
In dreams the maddening flash of those dark eyes  
Alight with mocking triumph—she, the slave  
Rich in the natural treasures of her kind,  
While I, her mistress . . . Ah ! I marvel yet  
That in full blast of passion I could hold  
These agéd, trembling fingers from their lust  
To span the swarthy circle of her throat  
And crush the double life !

But peace, my soul !

Now is her hour of triumph over-past,  
For I to Abraham have born a son,  
I who in scornful bitterness of heart  
Laughed at the promise of the Most High God,  
Who in His infinite pity of my shame  
Forebore to strike me lifeless, but fulfilled  
His glorious promise in the babe my son,  
Mine Isaac, mine, mine by the pangs of Eve,  
Mine, the late offspring of this withered flesh,  
The fruit of that sad woman who would fold  
The babes of happier sisters to her breast,  
Till in the mother's eye she read a glance  
Of half-exultant pity . . . silently  
Surrendering the load of sinless flesh  
That all the frenzied yearning of my life  
Had made mine own in fancy, I would creep  
Away to brood on my fast-fading youth,

Pregnant with dreadful tears that would not flow.  
So strong was this obsession of my grief  
That oft, e'en now, when sleep obscures my joy,  
Unwillingly I re-create the past  
And once again am childless in my dreams.  
Ah me, that lightning terror, ere the brain  
Can rise triumphant o'er the mists of sleep,  
'The moment's anguish while I stretch wild hands  
Through the black night—each hair-breadth of their  
course

Increasing agony—until they rest  
On him my babe, my treasure, warm with sleep.  
Ah! how I seize and strain him to my breast,  
Load him with such fierce kisses that my frame  
Shakes with the vehemence of my feasting lips.  
He wakens, and the soft caressing touch  
Of tiny fingers ranging round my breast  
Flings wide the flood-gates of my swelling heart,  
And I who, childless, knew not how to weep,  
Find blessed solace in a mother's tears.

Alas! this loving kindness of the Lord,  
This joy, this pride and crown of womanhood,  
Is but the dying splendour of mine end,  
The transient glory of my fading hour  
Ere I am lost in everlasting night.  
My life has but begun when I must die,  
I, who would fain lead Isaac by the hand

Far up the ascending pathway of his life,  
Am stayed by death, denied by destiny.  
And yet I need not fear for thee, my son,  
Thou hast found favour in the eyes of God :  
For solemnly to thy father Abraham  
He sware, " In Isaac shall thy seed be called,"  
And richly shall thy manhood yield increase,  
Yea, from thy loins a people shall arise,  
A nation of the seed of Abraham.  
I in mine age am chosen of the Lord,  
I, Sarah, late a scorn and a reproach,  
To bear at last to Abraham a son,  
Potential father of unnumbered hosts,  
Whose swelling tribes shall inundate the world.

## LOVE'S PROGRESS

### I

How fresh and fair the morn  
That greets mine eyes yet laden with the dew  
Of that deep sleep which follows weary hours  
Of rest forlorn.

Strange that I lay so long  
Picturing ever that little turn of the head  
Bird-like, the tender curve of her white throat  
Rippling in song,

Striving to see the face  
That flitted on the horizon of the mind :  
Then, as I thought to fix it, sank below,  
Leaving no trace.

Then sudden rose again,  
And hung elusive, troubling my repose ;  
Sweet face, I know not what you bring to me,  
Pleasure or pain.



Last night when first I met  
Those eyes, my heart stood emptied of its blood,  
Then bounded on in riot, close allied  
To pain . . . and yet

To me it seems so strange,  
On yester morn I heard the self-same thrush,  
Breathed the same air earth-scented . . . yet the  
world  
Hath suffered change.

## II

Can it be that she likes me,  
Am I faint-heart ? over-bold ?  
Now she appears to be gracious,  
Now to be courtly and cold.  
How may I read the riddle that lies  
Unrevealed by her eyes ?

Thrice have I felt her sweet presence  
Thrill me with joy and with pain,  
Sympathy seemed to be wakened——  
Was it a trick of the brain  
Summoning Hope, and fanning her fire  
With the breath of desire ?

## III

To-day I shall see her,  
    Clasp her hand in mine,  
And, spite the formal utterance  
Which Use demands, shall meet that glance  
    Which fires the blood like wine.

Oh deep dark wells of mystery,  
    Is she untouched, heart-whole ?  
Ah, what if it should only be  
Her perfect, woman's courtesy,  
    Index of her sweet soul.

## IV

June is here and the roses  
    Have laden with perfume the air,  
I plucked one, a queen among blossoms,  
    To give to my lady fair.  
O rich red rose, twice blest, twice blest,  
You were born to nestle against her breast.

She accepted it smiling divinely,  
    Then, casting the sweet eyes down,  
With slim white fingers she fastened  
    My rose in the folds of her gown.  
O rich red rose, twice blest, twice blest,  
To rise and fall on so pure a breast.

## V

She passed my window yester eve,  
    The sun was on her hair ;  
There seemed new splendour in the day,  
    Fresh glory in the air.  
She carolled lightly as she passed  
    Some snatch of melody,  
Which borne upon the listening breeze  
    Has floated back to me.

She passed my window yester eve,  
    Her robe was purest white ;  
One vast expanse of blue o'er-arched  
    A world of calm delight.  
The sun, his moon-tide ardour spent,  
    Was drooping toward the west,  
And as she passed my rose, my rose  
    Still nestled at her breast.

## VI

At eventide we twain  
Will tread the mazes of the solemn pines  
    Sweet-scented after rain.

I have her promise sweet  
Given, but not with that clear glance of hers  
Which quickens the heart's beat :

For lo ! to my surprise  
A shyness, sweet and strange, fluttered the lids  
Of her dear eyes,

But wherefore who can tell ?  
Perchance she caught a spark from that fierce flame  
Beneath the outer shell

Wherewith we shield from light  
The workings of the heart. But it may chance  
That, as I walk to-night,

With her sweet face so near,  
The tide of my deep passion in full flood  
Will burst the dam of fear.

## VII

She is mine, she is mine ! I have won her for ever :  
no more  
Shall my heart be torn and my brain be racked by  
the devil of doubt.

Mine, mine; the fierce, wild rapture of conquest  
thrills to my core,

Like the joy of a king who sees his enemy put to  
the rout.

She is mine, she is mine: die down, fair day, blest  
for ever thy name,

Day to be known and remembered with joy for  
myriad years;

Sink to thy rest, blessed Sun, in thy glorious ocean  
of flame,

For thou hast witnessed the death of my doubts  
and my fears.

There in the wood where so oft heart and ear have  
awaited her tread,

There where the burn 'mid the bracken danced and  
bubbled like wine,

Full in her eyes I gazed till, raising the delicate  
head,

She surrendered the warmth of her lips to the  
passionate pressure of mine.

Bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh: one in name, one  
in heart,

In one sweet current our blood shall flow on  
through the valley of life.

Hasten, thou day of all days, shine brightly and do  
not depart,

Till the holy rite in the village church hath made  
her a wife.

God, from Thy heaven look down on the joy of Thy  
creature to-night,

Take from me all that is base, make me worthy of  
her I have won :

Grant that we twain hand in hand may walk in Thy  
way, till the light

Of Thine own presence shall shine on us both, when  
the journey is done.

### VIII

The flush of dawn is creeping o'er the hills,  
A thousand birds are twittering of the day,  
The low of cattle echoes far away,  
The sky with radiance fills.

I stand without : within she lies asleep,  
And from her casement opening on the lawn  
The perfume of her presence greets the dawn,  
And makes my pulses leap.

Sleep on, fair soul ; let nothing break thy rest ;  
Then rise refreshed to shed thy gracious light,  
Until the sun, confessing thee more bright,  
Sinks, vanquished, in the West.

## FRENSHAM COMMON IN WINTER

A STRETCH of country open to the sky,  
Like careful housewife, clad in homely brown,  
Till summer bid her lay her prudence by  
And don the splendour of her purple gown ;  
Each mood and aspect of her—smile or frown—  
I love, and I have climbed the little hill  
That fronts the village inn, and gazing down  
Have felt her solitary grandeur fill  
My soul with wonder of a scene so calm and still.

I think I love her best in stormy tears,  
When the tall pines, green-stockinged 'gainst the rain,  
Sway, shuddering as with vague, unhappy fears,  
Sighing and moaning in Titanic pain :  
A wave of fear scuds quivering o'er the plain  
Of heather sprigs : above, a leaden sky,  
——It seems the sun will never shine again——  
While steady, sibilant rain falls ceaselessly,  
A weeping as of some immortal agony.

But see ! ere yet the short-lived day be fled  
The struggling sun, triumphant but to die,



Hath pierced the sullen greyness overhead  
To cheer the world, ere, sinking rapidly,  
He dips behind the ridge. With gentle sigh  
Murmur the winds. Large raindrops glitter on  
The leaves, like unshed tears on maiden's eye,  
Arrested by the smile so brave and wan  
She turns her lover, as he clasps her and is gone.

And lastly let us climb the little hill  
At noon: the sun strikes warm, though all the land  
Is bound by frost: the winds are hushed and still.  
Untiring sentinels, the pine trees stand  
Staid, solemn, motionless: on either hand  
Woodland and heath. Where'er the vision stray  
The scene is simple, elemental, grand  
In the deep stillness of a winter day——  
And lo! the City roar but forty miles away.

## OBSESSION

DEAREST, thou wert not beautiful to me  
When first we met, with speech conventional  
—The well-worn currency of social use—  
Thou who hast since put on such radiance  
That I can make confession how thy soul  
Shone clearer through the windows of thine  
eyes

Whene'er they greeted me, and day by day  
Some little unsuspected loveliness  
Lurked in thy face—that half-reluctant smile  
With shining eyes and lips that scarcely part  
Save for the little lift that mars their line——  
Mars? It hath grown so sweet as part of  
thee

That I might kiss and kiss and never sate  
My longing. Thou didst steal upon my soul  
Like some elusive cadence, throbbingly  
Repeated till when all the strings are mute  
It yet vibrates within the enraptured ear  
Surcharged with sweetness—all the mystery  
Of those grey orbs and that calm, serious brow  
Shaped to an arch by masses of dark hair . . .

Ah, my belovèd ! thou mayst smile secure  
In knowledge that thy loveliness, new-born,  
Hath cast a mist about the world and oped  
The gates of heaven to one human soul.

## THE DISCIPLE OF THOMAS HARDY

HE cares not for the city, core  
Of vast activities, the street  
Pulsing with busy life, the roar  
Of ceaseless feet ;

Where fierce desire of private gains  
Corrodes the finer edge of Truth—  
There, where the vampire City drains  
The blood of youth,

And men, who, void of pity, seek  
Their profit in another's fall—  
Press onward, heedless of the weak  
Crushed to the wall—

For him the air of heaven, free  
From taint of smoke, the dim blue line  
Of hills, the sighing of the sea  
In groves of pine,

The clean, white roads that stretch and wind  
Naked of traffic—all are part  
Of that green country that hath twined  
About his heart.

He reads the heavens at a glance,  
 Experienced from their outward form  
 To know the signs and weigh the chance  
 Of sun or storm.

Nor lonely he : his little sphere  
 Is thronged by creatures of his brain,  
 Touched by his craft to smile or tear,  
 Passion or pain.

And he must search his heart, and brood  
 In silence, striving toward the goal—  
 To draw at length, if God be good,  
 A living soul,

And cause the children of the soil,  
 Their elemental love and hate  
 Breathe in the throbbing page,—their toil  
 And simple fate.

He gleans the secret of the earth,  
 And only counts as wholly nought  
 The day that hath not brought to birth  
 One noble thought.

Beyond his art he would not range  
 Though seasons each to other yield,  
 And year by year the colours change  
 In hedge and field.

Give him a strip of English lawn,  
The broad expanse of English sky,  
And in an English summer dawn  
Let him die.

## THE LAST MONTH

STREAM flowing over the pebbles,  
Dancing by meadow and tree,  
Joining at length the great river,  
Merging at last in the sea,  
Tell me—thou prattlest of all things—  
Is he still faithful to me?  
Of course he is faithful . . . and yet  
If he should chance to forget!

Swallow with delicate pinions  
Wheeling thy flight through the air,  
Darting now higher, now lower,  
Doubling now here and now there,  
Tell me—thou seëst all places—  
Tell me, O does he still care?  
Surely he still cares . . . and yet  
If he should chance to forget!

Sun sinking slowly to westward,  
Flinging a rosier flame  
Dying to purple, returning,  
With the new day, whence it came.

Tell me—thou shinest on all things—

Will he come back—ere my shame?

He vowed he would wed me . . . and yet

O God, if he chance to forget!



## LAZARUS

“ ‘Where wert thou, brother, those four days?’  
There lives no record of reply,  
Which telling what it is to die  
Had surely added praise to praise.”

—TENNYSON.

MARY, I sit beside thee as of old  
Here in this chamber. Dearest one, I know  
Thou art the same, yet scarce can realise  
Aught of the present for my senses swoon  
Before the vision of the fearful past.  
For thou didst sit that night and watch me die,  
I saw the anguish written on thy face  
While thou didst tenderly with cool, light hand  
Smooth back the ruffled hair from off my brow  
Wet with the dew of death, and as I gazed  
Thy face receded from me: I was 'ware  
Of mighty rushing waters all around  
Which seemed to close above me, and I sank  
Deep, deep into a bottomless abyss,  
Each fibre of my body seemed to split  
And rend in dissolution. Suddenly  
As from a height incomprehensible  
I looked upon my body as it lay

Wrapped in the ghastly cerements of the dead.  
This incorporeal essence of the soul,  
Freed from the body's petty prison-house  
Looked down, and understood the littleness  
Of that new-shattered fastness. Then it seemed  
My soul was caught and whirled, I know not where,  
Backwards and forwards through infinities  
Undreamed of in this world, whereon we dwell  
Hedged round by the thick walls of ignorance.  
And I was 'ware of whisperings, and shapes  
That floated past, mysterious presences  
Seen yet not seen, dim, vague and shadowy  
As when, awaking from a dream, we strive  
In vain once more to range before the eye  
The unsubstantial images of sleep.  
And some, methought, there were that beckoned me  
With spectral fingers; otherwise gave faint cries  
Of woe unspeakable: to me it seemed  
The pent-up anguish of eternities  
Struggled for utterance, and then there fell  
A sudden, awful stillness: then, ah then—  
No more: 'tis blotted out from my remembrance.  
Thus I lay tranced, how long I may not know,  
Until the first dim stirrings of a joy  
Undreamed of filled my being, and I heard  
Faint as the flitting sigh of babes in sleep  
The whispering of the garments of the Christ,  
And then his voice cried "Lazarus, come forth,"

And panting to be free my soul was whirled  
Upward and ever upward to the Light.  
Fierce exultation warred with the agony  
Of a supreme convulsion, till I stood  
Re-incarnate in The Presence, and I shrieked  
As the full horror of a memory  
Was borne on me, but His uplifted Hand  
Was laid upon my brow, and at the touch  
The pangs of Death were conquered : this I know,  
Some deeper horror, now for ever lost,  
Passed with His blessed touch upon my brow :  
And He, methinks, hath left me some remembrance  
Of what I suffered verily I believe  
That I may lead a new and godly life  
Warned by the solemn mysteries of Death.

O the wild joy of living ! with new lungs  
To breathe the blessèd air of God's own heaven ;  
To feast the eye on foliage, and to smell  
The perfume of the earth, drawn out by tears  
Of rain which paint the herb a livelier green.  
Into this frame, once cold in death, to draw  
The concentrated essence of the sun,  
The splendour of the shining eye of God,  
To feel the life-blood riot through my veins  
All through the loving mercy of the Christ.

## BEFORE DAWN IN JUNE

THERE is a sense of dawn about the air,  
And in the East a belt of glimmering light  
Gives early promise of the waking sun.  
The cold moon sinks yet lower : the bright stars  
Pale into nothingness. A freshening breeze  
Rustles the leaves and soothes the fevered brows  
Of sleepers, tossing in the sullen heat  
That all night simmered gently o'er the world.  
The grey light slowly brightens in the East,  
The herald of the dawn, while soft at first  
But gathering volume, pour the liquid notes  
Of some glad bird, and instantly the sound  
Is caught, and echoed by a thousand throats  
Till all the air vibrates with melody.  
The distant low of cattle faintly falls  
Upon the listening senses : one by one  
The old familiar sounds of day are heard,  
At last the conscious East begins to blush  
Warmed by the first kiss of the risen sun.

## EVENING

ALONE I sat and waited for the night  
Till on the sun-kist mountains one bright ray  
Lingered, then vanished with the dying day.  
The distant peaks were slowly lost to sight  
Looming through belts of ever-waning light :  
With drowsy murmuring a rippling brook,  
Half hidden from my view by a dense nook  
Of clustering trees, pursued its lazy flight.  
A tremulous breeze just stirred the languorous air  
Irresolute, till, spread by God's own hand,  
The shroud of falling night enwrapped the land :  
In admiration of a scene so fair  
Long time I gazed, then homeward took my way  
Mourning the death of so divine a day.

## MIDNIGHT

MIDNIGHT ! there is some subtle mystery  
    About this border hour of night and day  
    Which passes forward swiftly on its way :  
Twelve light, sharp strokes have rung the short  
    hour by  
    And now 'tis morning : 'tis the instant birth  
    Of a new day upon the slumbrous earth,  
For the old day hath faded silently,  
    Sinking in darkness to its quiet rest,  
    Following its sun into the distant West  
To seek the couch where all the seasons die.  
It is the hour when darkness seems most tense.  
    So silent is it, one may almost hear  
    Time's mighty engines throbbing in the ear,  
Moulding the destiny of innocence.

## THE CONFESSION

HE

HERE by the dying embers will we sit—  
Our fingers twine—  
Your chair a little back—'twill better fit  
This tale of mine

That rises challenged by your purity :  
Take back your hand  
If, having heard, you shrink from me, for I  
Shall understand.

Were you less spotless . . . vain imagining !  
If that could be  
You were not you. Ah, therein lies the sting  
Of shame to me

Into whose tarnish'd soul you read your own  
Virginity :  
I feared to lose you if the truth were known—  
Stood silent by,

But now your perfect faith commands me speak  
Whate'er the cost—

Words are not easy . . . Dearest, I was weak,  
Young, passion-toss'd,

And she with luring beauty drew me on,  
Made me her thrall  
By instinct for my mood—and I was won . . .  
And—that is all—

Nay, 'tis not all, for doubly base were I  
To shelter in  
“The woman tempted me”—the earliest cry  
Of primal sin—

The blame is mine who plung'd into the net  
That she had laid.  
Past is the fleeting frenzy, but regret  
Will never fade.

Your answer, dearest—tell me by your eyes  
If love is dead . . .  
Your fingers tighten . . . do you realise  
All I have said?

#### SHE

Belovèd—as you are and e'er shall be—  
Not all unguessed  
In my own heart this—trouble which to me  
You have confessed,



Love hangs on little signs—oft would I think  
    From sudden glance  
Or pause your tongue was trembling on the brink  
    Of utterance.

And she—that woman . . . peace ! what counts the  
    whole

    World to us two ?  
You, you I want, belovèd : all my soul  
    Cries out for you.

The past is blotted from my memory—  
    Yours, yours alone  
Receive me. I surrender utterly.

HE

Your lips, my own !

## IN THE NIGHT WATCHES

THIS is the day she died :  
A sullen sky has darkened into rain,  
With tearing sobs of almost human pain  
The wild wind weeps outside.

This is the day she died,  
And this the chamber where she sank to rest,  
Her white hands folded o'er the purest breast  
For which a babe e'er cried.

For she, the truest wife  
That ever bowed before her motherhood,  
A week of suffering patiently withstood,  
Then left a tiny life,

A pledge of my short spell  
Of Paradise with her who lifted up  
My soul, when that dark devil of the cup  
Was luring it to Hell.

Yet when I saw the child  
Soft, warm, alive but at such bitter cost  
And mused on the white angel I had lost  
My rebel heart reviled :

And when the infant wailed,  
I, brooding on the havoc it had wrought  
On her fair body, cursed it in my thought  
And wept, and fiercely railed

Against the huckster, Death,  
And that hard bargain which with me he drave  
In snatching my belovèd to the grave  
Who yielded her sweet breath

To fan the tiny spark  
Of life in the babe's bosom : empty gain  
To bring into the world this child of pain :  
Then came a time so dark,

When the full sense of loss  
Was borne upon me by the vacant chair—  
No tender, woman's sympathy to share  
Each trivial joy or cross—

The fiend, with whom I strove  
Of old, renewed his specious whispering,  
Answered my soul, "Thou canst not do this thing,  
For thou hast known her love."

The mocking voice replied :  
" Fool, thou wert not uplifted, though she loved :  
She was debased by thee : to anger moved  
God smote her, that she died.

Turn thou again to me,  
For I have set my seal upon thy face  
Indelible : thou canst not take thy place  
Once more among the free."

My soul again. "To such  
As thou, fiend, Love would seem but empty lies,  
All that is pure and true withers and dies  
Polluted by thy touch.

And thou, despairing man,  
Take courage : know that she that was thy wife,  
God's emissary, came into thy life  
To free it of the ban

Which daily drew thee lower.  
Then God, His will performed, her mission spent,  
Summoned her to His Throne, yet, ere she went,  
She bare to thee this flower

To lift thee from the brute.  
Nourish it carefully, lest any blight  
Or vileness such as turned thy day to night  
Should mar the perfect fruit."

At this high answer, sore  
Abashed the fiend departed for a space,  
Returned, but ever weaker by God's grace :  
At length he came no more.

. . . . .

The years were born and died :  
And Time, the wise physician, in his wake  
Brought Resignation, lest my grief should break  
A heart so sorely tried.

And she, my dear, my own,  
To whom I felt so bitter at her birth,  
Brings her sweet mother daily back to earth  
By gesture, glance and tone.

Her chamber holds e'en now,  
Removed from me by one dividing wall,  
Her virgin bosom's rhythmic rise and fall ;  
And, as athwart the snow

That clothes a wintry heath  
A tree lies prone, her tresses kiss her breast,  
While here a tendril quivers in unrest,  
Fanned by her measured breath.

Dear heart, thy loveliness  
Cannot be mine for ever : thou wilt wed,  
And children with the features of the dead  
Shall lisp for my caress.

In watches of the night  
I muse, as now, on those once bitter days ;  
Where is thy sting, O Death ? I yield the praise  
To Him that sent me light.

To me the truth is clear  
That in his wisdom infinite, God, who knew  
Earth could not hold the sweetness of the two,  
Left her, the daughter, here

And sent pale Death to free  
The spirit of the mother. Be he late  
Or early in his coming, I await  
His summons patiently.

## THE SONG OF THE PROPHETS OF BAAL

“And they took the bullock which was given them and they dressed it and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying: ‘O Baal, hear us.’ But there was no voice nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar which was made” (1 Kings xviii. 26).

“And they cried aloud and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets till the blood gushed out upon them” (ver. 28).

“And it came to pass when mid-day was past and they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice that there was neither voice nor any to answer nor any that regarded” (ver. 29).

### I

O BAAL, hear us, hear us as we cry,  
And from on high  
Send down Thy fire upon our humble sacrifice.

Behold a jet black bullock we have ta'en,  
For Thee have slain,  
And see ! upon Thine altar dressed the victim lies

Young, tender, without blemish, without spot,  
Whose blood, yet hot,  
Is duly sprinkled round the sacrificial pyre.

## 68 SONG OF THE PROPHETS OF BAAL

Hear us Thy servants calling on Thy name,  
Descend in flame,  
Wreathing Thy Godhead in a cloud of fierce-  
consuming fire.

### II

Hear us, O Baal, we call to Thee, hear us, O Baal.  
Harken Omnipotent, Terrible, Mighty One, Lord  
of the earth,  
Lo! on the summit of Carmel Thy prophets call ever  
upon Thee—  
We that are dust in Thine eyes, Great Ruler of  
Death and of Birth.

Hear us, O Baal, look down upon Israel gathered  
together,  
Tribe upon tribe to the honour and glory of Him  
they adore :  
List to the voice of a people, O turn not Thy  
countenance from us,  
Visit thine altar with flame for a sign Thou art  
God evermore.

Wilt thou not hear us, O Baal? the valleys re-echo  
our wailing,  
See, at the base of thine altar the blood of the  
victim is dry.



SONG OF THE PROPHETS OF BAAL 69

Tremulous, panting, importunate—Baal, have mercy  
upon us,

Lo! 'tis the heart of a nation ascends in our  
dolorous cry.

Have we offended unknowing, unwitting provoked  
Thee to anger?

Gaze on the pastures of Israel teeming with  
creatures of Thine—

Rivers of blood for Thy bathing, if only Thou send  
us, O Baal,

Flame as a token of pardon: O grant us a sign.

III

Hear us, O Baal.

Why dost Thou turn from us?

Why art thou deaf

To the voice of our agony?

Art thou athirst

For the streams of our being?

Behold, from our bodies

The bright blood is flowing—

Taste of it, drink of it,

Hear us, O Baal.

Hear us, O Baal.

Wilt thou endure

To be mocked and despised  
 By a stranger, a prophet  
 Of one that we know not ?  
 O Mighty Avenger,  
 Ineffable Majesty,  
 Haste, in 'Thine anger  
 Descend and destroy him.

Mercy, O Baal !  
 Fainting with weariness,  
 Maddened by thirst—  
 Parched are our lips  
 As the sand of the desert.  
 Blood ? It is gushing  
 In rivers of crimson,  
 Bathe in it, drink of it,  
 Hear us, O Baal !

## IV

Wilt thou not hear us, pitiless in Thy cruelty ?  
 Hear us, O Baal, Thy people murmur against Thee—  
 Carmel running with gore as it were a slaughter of  
 soldiery.  
 Ah, have a care, cruel God ! with fury a nation is  
 smouldering.  
 Hear us, or Israel goaded to madness will trample  
 Thine images,

## SONG OF THE PROPHETS OF BAAL 71

Dash to the ground Thine altar, leave no stone on another—

We Thy prophets be put to the sword by a people infuriate.

### V

Hear us, O Baal, we cry,  
Faintly we call unto Thee,  
Wilt thou not grant us a sign?

Here in the gathering gloom  
Kindle the flame of Thy wrath,  
Lighting the city beneath.

### VI

Lo! we are swooning and dying for loss of the  
blood that hath glutted the lust of Thy craving,  
Swollen and black are the clamorous tongues that  
have pleaded in vain to the God of their  
worship,

Out of the confident army whose voices vibrated and  
thrilled through the air of the morning  
Naught but a handful remaining to totter and stumble  
in agony, whispering hoarsely.

Hear us, O Baal, the prophet of Him that we know  
not is mocking our desperate wailing,

72 SONG OF THE PROPHETS OF BAAL

Hear us, O Baal, Thy people are menacing, muttering,  
murmuring wildly against Thee ;

Hear us, O Baal, O Baal behold ! we are goaded to  
madness, o'erdriven by cruelty, hear or we curse  
Thee.

## THE OFFERTORY

DEAREST, I offer you love ;  
Take it, my sweet, 'tis your due ;  
Take all my life with it too,  
Take, then, my love.

Here is your hand in the gloom—  
Frail little hand that I fold  
In mine, yet strong to uphold  
The life of a man.

Why do I love ? do you ask  
Wherein my tenderness lies ?  
I can see God in your eyes,  
Dearest and best.

## UNDER PROMISE OF MARRIAGE

I GAVE you all I had,  
My maidenhead,  
You plucked, enjoyed, then cast aside  
The flower——dead.

'Twas such an easy thing  
For you : and I ?  
What consolation for my loss,  
What remedy ?

To drag my shame before  
A gaping crowd ?  
To hear your words, once sacred,  
Read aloud

By him, my hireling, paid  
To twist and turn  
Even Love's language to advance  
My cause, and earn

For me the paltry dole  
The law allows  
To balance tarnished honour, love in ashes,  
Broken vows ?

No, no a thousand times :

Never for me

The gold that would have smoothed our path  
In unity.

No dross from you shall rear

The child of sin,

Eve's curse is mine, but not the crown of joy  
My sisters win

Who, bound by that sweet oath

In Cana sworn,

Forget their travail, raptured by the thought  
“ A man is born.”

For me the whispered word,

The sidelong glance,

Even more deadly and more eloquent  
Than utterance.

But you the world will hold

Scarcely to blame,

The chatter of the clubs will lightly play  
About your name.

“ No doubt she led him on,

Met him half-way——”

O God ! the men escape the penalty,  
The women pay.

76 UNDER PROMISE OF MARRIAGE

Why not one law for both,  
One social code ?  
The woman errs for ever : and the man ?—  
A wild oat sowed,

No more : so thinks the world.  
Men spurn aside  
The hound that rolls in mire, yet, foul themselves,  
Demand a bride

Of icy chastity,  
Untrodden snow :  
Are you, I wonder, such an one as these,  
And will you go

To some pure, spotless girl,  
And, void of shame,  
Give to her—what you never gave to me—  
The shelter of your name ?

Fool that I was to yield  
To your strange spell,  
Anticipate my heaven——realize  
My Hell.

I deemed you soul of truth :  
You could not go  
Back on your word : too trusting ? yes——but then  
I loved you so.



And when the letter came  
                     In which you strove  
 To clothe in paraphrase a simple truth,  
                     The death of love,

My soul, her moorings broken,  
                     Tossed about  
 This way and that, like to a helmless barque  
                     Upon the sea of doubt.

You thought to cast aside  
                     A broken toy——  
 You and your type can scarcely realize  
                     That you destroy

A woman's life, her faith  
                     In God, and wake  
 The devil ever sleeping in her breast  
                     That bids her slake

Unholy thirsts, and add  
                     One more recruit  
 To London's nightly regiment of shame,  
                     Or taste her Dead Sea fruit

In loftier spheres of vice  
                     Less openly——  
 Enough. That horror, by the grace of God,  
                     Has passed me by.

The child and I will go  
                                 To some retreat  
 Where, as a widow—God will pardon me  
                                 The slight deceit—

I may win love, respect,  
                                 The means of grace,  
 And this my earnest prayer that I no more  
                                 May look upon thy face.

## THE POET'S THREE MASTERS

LISLESS upon his couch the Poet lay  
Wrapped in a waking trance ; the moonless night  
Died slowly Eastward, and the winds were still.  
And lo, as he lay tranced a Vision bright  
As Summer sun at noon which dazzled him  
With its effulgence ! when his blinded eyes  
Resumed their office he beheld a child  
With hair of streaming gold, and o'er his head  
A halo shone, then disappeared and shone  
Again with brighter glory. “ Who art thou ? ”  
The Poet cried : with gentle smile the boy  
Made answer, “ I am he that men call Hope,  
For I am with thee day and night unseen,  
Yet sometimes dost thou catch a glimpse of me  
When thy sweet songs, polished with loving care,  
Summon approval from the lips of men,  
And ofttimes fade I utterly, when thy lyre,  
Which thou wast wont to smite in ecstasy,  
Till its rich harmonies engulfed the air,  
Gives forth a wretched tinkle to thine ear  
Fearful of discord : but lift up thy heart,  
My light is but eclipsed by such dark hours,

Not hid from thee for ever." As he spake  
Hope sudden vanish'd : slowly died the night,  
And from the utter stillness rose a sound,  
The whirr of distant wings in act of flight.  
We hear it nigh the dawn when all the winds  
Lie tranced, and marvel at it, knowing not  
It is the whisper of the wings of Love  
Flitting from soul to soul. The Poet heard  
And wondered : then, as nearer throbbed the sound,  
A mighty pulse vibrated through the air.  
Something of fear knocked at the Poet's heart,  
Followed by mystic, languorous delight  
Yielding to fiercer rapture. He beheld  
A woman clothed in beams of rosy light  
Whose features, dimly beautiful, escaped  
His clearer vision. " Who art thou ? " he cried.  
Then issuing from her misty loveliness  
A voice of rarest cadence made reply,  
Thrilling his inmost soul. " My name is Love,  
Hereafter shalt thou see my face, but now  
I am to thee a vision glorious,  
Yearned for in secret, dreamed of in the night,  
Fashioned in fancy—eyes and lips and hair—  
Yet all a mirage : but a day will dawn  
—Early or late alone my Master knows—  
When I shall stand revealed for evermore  
In the clear mirror of a maiden's eyes,  
And in thy passion thou shalt sweep the strings

In deeper and more tremulous ecstasy  
Till thy rich notes, vibrating through the air,  
Shall thrill the souls of men, for with mine aid  
Thou shalt achieve unutterable things.  
I go : yet seek me not with diligence,  
Keep pure thy heart, and all unasked I come.  
Farewell." The vision faded, and the mist  
Flowed through the open casement and was lost.  
Then as he lay the Poet chilled, and fell  
From exaltation, like to one whom wine  
Of rarest vintage raises to the heights  
Then dashes earthwards, when the magic draught  
Hath spent its virtue. 'Twas the moment tense,  
Heavy, expectant, ere the birth of day  
Is by His creatures chorused up to God.  
A sudden breeze, so faint it scarce might stir  
The aspens from their sleep, yet strangely chill  
Caressed the Poet's brow : he seemed to feel  
Cold fingers at his heart. He raised his eyes  
To meet a Figure draped in sable shroud,  
Nor sound nor motion broke the awful calm.  
"Speak, who art thou?" he whispered with white  
lips.  
Slow from the gloom came answer, "I am Death,  
This hour is mine : I come before the dawn  
Lest weary souls should see another day  
Rise on their pain. Those in the joy of youth  
Quail at my breath chill-wafted as I pass

To claim some well-belovèd of their blood  
And lift wild hands against God's messenger,  
Forgetting I shall soon appear to them  
Benign and peaceful. Dearly loved of thine  
Shall feel my icy kiss upon their lips.  
But when thine early stupor yields to Time,  
My Brother, then I chasten, making thy song  
Clearer and purer through adversity.  
Last will I come for thee, and thou shalt pass,  
Yet may thy song defy me, if thou write  
To God's dictation, scorning to blaspheme  
His holy utterance with words of thine  
Attuned to catch the grosser ear of man.  
Farewell until the day I come for Thee."  
Death faded, and the trance was broken through ;  
And rising from his couch the Poet watched  
The stately elms loom greener, standing out  
More clearly 'gainst the slowly brightening East,  
While from their branches brake the triumph song.  
"Hope, Love and Death," he cried, "have I beheld,  
Three Masters of my craft. Hope have I known,  
Love have I yearned for, and have quailed at Death.  
Yet each of them shall point me some fresh truth  
To weave into my song in years to come  
Till Death, the Final Master, bids me cease."

# THE FAREWELL OF LANCELOT AND GUINEVERE

(FROM AN UNPUBLISHED DRAMA)

SCENE.—*The guest chamber in a convent at Ambresbury in  
Wiltshire. Doors on L. and at back*

*Enter at back the ABBESS and LANCELOT*

ABBESS

And so, Sir Knight, thou dost desire to hold  
Speech with this novice who so lately sought  
And found admission to our sisterhood ?

LANCELOT

Yea, madam : of thy courtesy I pray  
Lead me to her that we may hold converse

ABBESS

Thy name ?

LANCELOT

My name ? Must I, then, tell my name ?

ABBESS

Yea, of thy grace, for so our rules demand.

LANCELOT

My name is—Lancelot.

ABBESS

Thou . . . Sir Lancelot—

And she—and she ?

LANCELOT

She is—Queen Guinevere.

ABBESS

Ah, Heaven, and art thou come to work on her,  
To lure her hence with specious promises  
And drag her back to shame ? Dost thou not know  
Her sin and thine is blazoned o'er the world  
That thou com'st hither, shameless in thy shame,  
Deeming thine infamy within these walls  
Unknown, to thine unworthy purposes  
Shaping our fancied ignorance ?

LANCELOT

God knows

I merit thy reproaches—every word—  
For what is past, but, madam, I am come  
To seek the Queen and bind her fast to me  
In bonds of Holy Church before the world.  
Thus may we make atonement for our sin.



ABBESS

Atonement ? Ay, perchance in the eyes of men,  
But in the eyes of God . . . ? It may be best .  
We do not hold a novice 'gainst her will . . .  
How may I know, e'en though she yield to thee,  
That thou wilt wed her ?

LANCELOT

Dost thou doubt my word ?  
(*Sadly*) Alas ! It is no marvel if my sin  
Hath maimed my credit. If the Queen consent  
Then let a priest be summoned, and thyself  
A witness, he shall make us truly one  
By all observances and holy rites.

*[The ABBESS considers a moment, then claps  
her hands twice.]*

*Enter a Nun*

ABBESS

Child, wilt thou send the novice late arrived  
Hither to me on the instant ?

NUN

Mother, I go.

*[The NUN goes out on L.]*

## ABBESS

Sir Lancelot, thou shalt see her ; I will touch  
No more upon the past—that is for God  
And not for me to weigh. It seems that I  
Have done thee wrong, endued thy purposes  
With unimagined baseness, for the which  
I ask thy pardon.

## LANCELOT

Madam, 'twas not strange  
Thou should'st mistrust me, for my way of life  
Hath forfeited my fame.

## ABBESS

I do not think  
Thou shalt prevail, for all her hopes are based  
On silent meditation, ceaseless prayer,  
Untiring vigil, and her soul is fed  
By fasting of the flesh. Behold, she comes !

[*The ABBESS advances towards the door on  
L., by which enter GUINEVERE in  
the garb of a novice. The ABBESS  
takes her arm.*

## GUINEVERE

Mother, thou would'st have speech of me ?

## ABBESS

My child——

GUINEVERE

(*Seeing LANCELOT*) Lancelot ! Mother of Heaven !

[*She falls back into the ABBESS' arms in a half swoon. The ABBESS signing to LANCELOT to retire up stage, he does so.*

What brings him here ?

Thou knowest . . . ? Nay, thou canst not, else thine  
arm

Had never twined about me. I am she

Who wrought such——

ABBESS

Peace, my daughter ! I know all,  
And therefore hold thee closer. He is come  
With that which must be said to thee alone.  
Courage ! I shall be near thee—within hail.

GUINEVERE

(*Clinging to the ABBESS*) Ah, do not leave me !

ABBESS

(*Gently disengaging herself*) I shall be so near.

[*Exit ABBESS on L.*

[*LANCELOT comes down stage and stands before GUINEVERE : a moment of silence.*

## GUINEVERE

Why art thou come to trouble my repose  
Flooding my heart with memories ?

## LANCELOT

Guinevere,

Word of that last grim battle in the West  
Had scaled ere now these ancient convent walls.  
Arthur is dead. Strange rumours of his end  
Are blown about the world—a mystic barge  
Wherein 'midst weeping Queens he passed away  
Whither, who knows ?—wild tales are ever rife  
In that disruption wrought by the death of kings.  
Arthur is dead : I saw him ere the end,  
When naught might staunch his wound, and solemnly  
He laid on me this charge, to bind myself  
To thee in holy wedlock. Guinevere,  
By all the saints I conjure thee——

## GUINEVERE

No more !

Why hast thou broken in upon my peace ?  
Why art thou come, uprooting from my heart  
With ruthless hand this tender shoot of Hope  
Planted by God and watered with such tears  
As Mary showered upon the feet of Christ ?  
Why com'st thou hither, shattering with a glance

The wall which I had built 'twixt thee and me,  
Each stone a prayer wrung from my tortured  
soul?

O with what painful and laborious steps  
I trudged the daily path to grace—and now  
The sight of thee, thou partner of my shame,  
Awakes the awful voice that cries to heaven,  
“Guinevere, thou art stained for evermore.  
Seek not salvation: vain are all thy hopes.”  
O, by the passion that consumed us twain  
And wrought such woe I charge thee, get thee  
hence  
That I may look upon thy face no more!

LANCELOT

God knows I sinned in loving Arthur's Queen,  
But Arthur is no more, and though his death  
Was hastened through my sin, yet thou art free,  
Come, let us make amends for what is past,  
And after decent interval, ere yet  
The year of thy noviciate be sped  
Unite us in the bonds of Holy Church——

GUINEVERE

That we whose guilty passion slew the King  
Should profit by his death, gloss o'er our sin,  
Clutch at salvation through the sacred vows  
Ordained by Holy Church for virgin souls!

What sacrifice were this, what offering  
To lay before the Throne?

LANCELOT

O Guinevere,

'Twas Arthur's dying wish that we should wed.  
Has that no force to work upon thy soul,  
Battle thy scruples, woo thee to consent?  
Not yet hast thou embraced the final vows . . .  
At last shalt thou and I be truly one,  
And Time with slow, obliterating hand  
Shall blur this horror that besets thy soul,  
And we shall dwell at peace with God and man,  
Each all-sufficient in the other's eyes.

GUINEVERE

Nay, nay, it could not be. How alien  
Were the cold marble of reality  
To this impetuous fiction of thy brain  
Born of the moment, fathered by desire.  
Ah, when the fire was dying from mine eye,  
And ruthless Time had scored upon my brow  
The chequered tracery of relentless years,  
Death warrant of my youth, dumb testimony,  
Then daily should I wake in terror, gaze  
With pitiful intentness on thy face,  
Dreading the soulless tolerance of those eyes  
Which once had flamed to mine. For, Lancelot, thou

Didst love me for perfection of my form,  
My faultless flesh—accursèd heritage  
Of women when they wed not with the soul.  
And thou would'st loathe me, beautiful no more,  
Chafe at the bonds that held thee fast to me  
Who waded to thine arms through Arthur's blood . . .  
(*More quietly and sadly*) No child was born of me unto  
the King—

No kiss of velvet lips about my breast,  
No little helpless hands whereon our own  
Might clasp in that vast tenderness which comes  
Of deeper understanding . . . tiny hands,  
Yet strong enough to thrust *thee* from my side . . .  
How often, turning suddenly my head,  
I found on me the sad and pensive gaze  
Of Arthur. He would look away and sigh.  
And I, to whom each glance was dumb reproach,  
Assailed the Blessèd Virgin with wild prayers,  
Scarring with bitter, unavailing tears  
My midnight couch—yet never babe of me  
That might have held me faithful to the King.  
(*More wildly*) Now he is dead, and it is thou and I  
Have slain him! O, thy face brings back to me  
That awful night at Camelot of doom  
And blood and terror—Modred—Arthur's death.

[*She shudders, covering her face with her  
hands: then bursts forth:*

Hence! Get thee gone! O leave me with my dead!

## LANCELOT

Guinevere, Guinevere, whither shall I go?  
Must I endure, so utterly alone  
To drag my life out, haunted evermore  
By pale, accusing spectres of dead knights—  
This life of mine which thou hast filled to the brim  
With the rare vintage of thy loveliness?  
I cannot leave thee. Pity my despair—  
Guinevere!

## GUINEVERE

Is it easy, thinkest thou,  
For me to hear the music of thy voice  
In wild entreaty—then to bid thee go  
Out of my life for ever? Press me no more,  
Thou shalt not shake me from my firm resolve  
Wound me no further.

## LANCELOT

Is there then no hope  
On earth for me? My last appeal . . . Ah, once  
I had not pled in vain!

## GUINEVERE

That hour is past  
For ever. I am bride of Holy Church,  
And I with tears, with fastings, and with prayer  
Must purge away those years of sin with thee



But thou—go forth into the world, and seek  
Some high-souled maid and wed her, for thy sin  
To mine was light, and pray thou for my soul  
As I for thine. Farewell.

LANCELOT

O Guinevere——

GUINEVERE

Help me a little—make it not too hard.  
Come.

*[She leads him to the door at back. He  
turns and takes both her hands.]*

LANCELOT

I have failed—then—Guinevere ?

GUINEVERE

Thou hast failed.

LANCELOT

O light and wine and glory of my life,  
I, who on earth have won and lost my Heaven,  
Unwillingly surrender thee to God.  
Since thou, the flaming sun of all my hopes,  
Art set in this calm sea of penitence  
And prayer, I, too, will take on me the vows.  
No maid shall call me lord, for thou long since

With one sweet glance unpeopled all the world  
Of women in mine eyes. Farewell . . . Farewell.

*[They stand gazing at each other for a moment, then LANCELOT goes out. GUINEVERE stands motionless, then cries, "Mother! Mother!" The ABBESS enters, and GUINEVERE falls weeping into her arms. From without is heard a chorus of nuns chanting in unison.]*

ABBESS

*(Gently)* Vespers, my child. Strengthen thy heart  
with prayer.

Come.

*[The ABBESS leads GUINEVERE off on L.]*

THE END

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